


September 1999 Vol. 6 No 9

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Contact: (780) 423-9922 Ext. 248

Our Voice

Publisher:
Bissell Centre, Edmonton

Managing Editor
Michael Walters
Design and Production
Dave Luxton
Distribution
Natasha Robinson
Proof Readers
Kara Dublenko
Kyla Booth

428-4001 in Edmonton
1-888-428-4001

Editorial Offices and
Edmonton Distribution at:
Bissell Centre
10527-96 Street • Edmonton, Alberta
• T5H 2H6

Phone: 428-4001 • **Fax:** 497-7077

EMAIL:
sparechg@freenet.edmonton.ab.ca

WEBSITE:
www.planet.eon.net/~kwiley/
voicehome.html

Cover photos by
Cheung Ching-Ming

OUR VOICE is published to provide an income opportunity for economically marginalized people in our society while communicating about their issues to the public.

OUR VOICE is a **NON-PROFIT** program that survives on vendors, advertising contributions and Tax Deductible Donations.

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Our Voice is a member of the North American Street Newspaper Association **NASNA**.

Our Voice to host North American Street Newspaper conference in 2000

Cleveland rocks in '99

by Michael Walters

It started off with poetry. The great Marc Goldfinger from Cambridge, Massachusetts stood in front of a microphone and crisply delivered his verses of lust and life and death. Goldfinger now clean and alive, after decades of drug abuse, also the former editor of Spare Change in Boston was joined by Cleveland's Daniel Thompson in welcoming street papers from across the continent to the sweltering Ohio city. Their poetry of pain and hope stuck to the people in the room more than did the sweat of the 95 degrees of torturous humidity.

The North American Street Newspaper Association came to life nearly five years ago with its inaugural conference in Chicago and since has traveled to Seattle, Montreal and now Cleveland. In the year 2000, the conference will come to Edmonton. The conference will be held at the University of Alberta from July 20-23.

"I thought that this year's conference was the best that we've had so far. We really came together as a group focused on NASNA being a powerful media tool in the new millennium. It is because of papers like the one in Edmonton that I feel we have such a strong presence in the world of newspapers," says Angelo Anderson from the Homeless Grapevine in Cleveland. Anderson is the Co-Chair of NASNA along with Eric Cimone from Journal L'itineraire in Montreal.



Michael Walters and Curly from StreetWise in Chicago

There are now more than seventy member papers involved with NASNA, most of which are in the United States.

At this year's conference the focus was on evolving as an organization, on actually becoming a mechanism with a legitimate force toward changing some of the harshest realities of human life. Most profoundly the issues that relate to poverty and homelessness, but that is not all.

Tim Harris, past President of NASNA and director of Real Change in Seattle clearly stated this while speaking to the conference about the future of NASNA.

"We need to be relevant... and we can't just have tunnel vision on homelessness. There are other issues like labour and prison systems... that are relevant to what our papers are about," said Harris, also emphasizing the importance of the quality of each publication.

"I thought that Congressman (Dennis) Kucinich (from Ohio) set the perfect tone for this year's conference by telling us that

our papers represent the pulse of the community and are the basis for social justice. I think that we are beginning to progress as an organization. We have a clear set of goals and objectives and we hope to make some progress this year. I think we are now beginning to gel as an organization and have put aside our differences. I am more enthusiastic about NASNA than I have been over the last four years," said Brian Davis, Editor of the Homeless Grapevine in Cleveland.

One of NASNA's main goals is to have a street paper in every major North American city by the year 2005. This would without question strengthen the street paper and anti-poverty movement in both Canada the U.S significantly.



Brian Davis (left), Editor Homeless Grapevine Cleveland with Michael Stoops Director of National Coalition for the Homeless

One of the highlights at the Conference in Cleveland, aside from the Canadians dominating a Saturday night baseball game, was the keynote Address given by former Street News (New York) vendor and editor Lee Stringer. He talked about the rise of what was actually North America's first street paper and about his life living as a crack addict in the subways of Grand Central Station, moving up through the ranks of Street News and eventually publishing his own novel Grand Central Winters (see page 3).

Stringer was an amazing speaker who leaned on his own experiences to articulate his views of what everyone was gathered to discuss.

"Homelessness isn't really a problem, it is a circumstance of all kinds of problems," he said.

Stringer was asked about his days as a vendor and how he would respond to someone, who was interested in buying the paper, who asked him whether he was going to spend the money on drugs or alcohol.

"Buying a street paper is cheap way for someone to get out of their social contract, the way I look at it. It only takes a second. You give a guy a buck and now you want a guarantee. I don't think so," he said.

All hopes are that **Our Voice** and the city of Edmonton will be able to carry the torch that NASNA has brightly lit. The business of the Association is of utmost importance to the lives of many people and needs to be taken further. The stories and the work of street papers around the world play an important role in the fight to end poverty and the mistreatment of people everywhere. NASNA and each individual paper has a responsibility to get stronger.

"NASNA seems to be growing up. We're focusing less upon our differences, and working more from our commonalties. I think we'll see a lot of growth in existing papers this year, and a number of new papers getting started," says Harris.

Our Voice on the WEB

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Call or write to Our Voice.



Former street paper vendor writes his life

by Michael Walters

He was looking for something pointy. He was digging around in his hole, a long narrow crawl space, deep in the hollows of Grand Central Station. It was where he lived and had for sometime. He needed a "dowellike instrument with which to push the screens from one end of his stem to another", so that he could smoke up the remaining resin caked up in his crack-pipe. What he found was a pencil, and it worked. He was able to take a hit and have a "pleasurable half hour of sweaty, trembling panic..."

So he had this pencil and one day while sitting in his hole with nothing to smoke or nothing to do, he remembered there was this old composition notebook down there somewhere. He started writing and he really got into it. He actually let it get too late and forgot to go out and cop his fix.

"I don't think there's been a day since I started that I have gone without at least one hit."

He was writing a story about a guy who wanted to get some pills so he could take himself out before the AIDS virus got him and he wants to wander over to a park to "lay down and fade away on the grass. Only he feels he needs to apologize to the world because he has to die in public. And someone will have to come along and pick up his sorry, dead ass, and all. But he's homeless, there's no place for him to go."

According to great American novelist, Kurt Vonnegut, who wrote the forward in Lee Stringer's book, called "Grand Central Winter", "Stringer is a self educated story teller of the first rank, an unembittered, hopeful survivor of extreme poverty, long term homelessness and addiction."

Stringer was living in a walk up on east ninety-sixth street, working at his own Graphic Design business and living with an emptiness he didn't care to challenge. He spent his nights pouring doubles down his throat at any number of neighbourhood bars.

Then his brother died. His name was Wayne and he was really sick. He was pale and weak. Lee had taken him to Bellevue Hospital and demanded he be admitted after they'd refused him. His brother had AIDS.

One morning while Lee was desperately grasping for his hold on sleep, wary of the hangover that promised to cripple him upon rising, the phone rang and rang. He ignored it. Later that day he made his way to the hospital to visit his brother. That's when they told him he was dead.

That night Lee found himself in another bar,

blitzed and full of rage. A friend offered to give him a ride home and also offered to give him something to make him feel better. It was his first experience with crack cocaine.

I draw on the stem. The bowl fills with a thick, swirling cloud. I cannot feel the heat of the smoke as it goes down. But I can taste it. It is a taste I know I'm going to love. The taste of success, love, orgasm, omnipotence, immortality, and winning the lottery all rolled into one. My hangover evaporates like steam off a griddle. The dark corners of the room brighten. The predawn quietude explodes with bustle. Suddenly the room cannot contain my spirit. What a great feeling! I love the whole fucking free world!

A few minutes later the bottom starts to fall out of the high. Sadness and longing descend over me. Utter desolations hovers moments away. I am seized by a wave of panic. I want that party feeling back.

So he asks his friend if they can get some more. They can, his friend tells him.

So Lee digs into his pocket and hands over the "first fifty of the more than one hundred thousand dollars he would eventually smoke up before the party really ends."

In a few short months Stringer was tossed from his apartment on to the hard streets of New York City. It didn't take him long to believe that living on the streets was not really an "insurmountable inconvenience". There was a certain freedom to it, of course the freedom was limited to what was forced upon him, that being the circumstances of his existence.

He learned the in and outs of soup kitchens and service centres and then became one of the cities more proficient bottle pickers, netting up to a hundred dollars a day at times. It was an easy way to hustle up money to buy the fix he needed. So that was his freedom. He was hocking cans, living in a hole in the subway station and smoking crack, all the while extremely aware of this life and what it meant to him.

Then his industry took a hit. The supermarkets where he was cashing in his crop of glass and aluminum began limiting their intake of returns. The police started arresting "his type". Lee's income plummeted.

Lee found Street News in 1989. Street News is North America's oldest and largest street newspaper. It was founded by a man named Hutchinson Person, who really was interested in hosting a big rock concert where his name could shine high in neon lights and he would become the guy known to have solved hunger in New York. But the concert never happened and Persons had raised all this money and needed something to do with it. So he started Street News. He was half angel half devil, doing the right thing with the wrong intentions. But suddenly the city's home-

less were making money because of this paper and with the top cut off the bottle picking trade, Lee Stringer became one of them.

We bought the papers for a quarter each, sold them for seventy-five cents. Three bucks for every dollar invested. The papers flew out of our hands for all over the city the streets were filled with homelessness and compassion. Even a mindless schnook can take home sixty dollars a day. For those of us with demons to feed, the easy money rendered thoughts of larceny obsolete, and for those who suffered only from cruel circumstances, it was a chance to once again dare to flirt with dreams.

In its beginnings Street News was selling more than 250,000 copies per issue and was helping people get off the streets. Street papers are flexible and allow for homeless people to make money at any time. "Working nine to five and living on the street don't mix".

Stringer would eventually become editor of and a major writing contributor to Street News. He even moved into their offices on ninth avenue unbeknownst to the paper's management. He continued hustling the paper and he continued smoking crack, obviously not an easy addiction to overcome.

Lee Stringer was in Cleveland, Ohio this past July, as the Key Note speaker at the North American Street Newspaper Association conference. Ten years after he first got involved with Street News in New York, he spoke to a crowd of more than a hundred people about his life on the streets, his addiction which he beat, his newly published novel and his experiences working with Street News.

"Street papers are way harder (to operate) than regular papers. It's like three or four businesses," Stringer said. "The public expects two fold. They want stories about homelessness, but they don't want to read about homelessness all the time."

In turn Stringer went on to say that "the most neglected people in the street paper business are the reader and the publisher."

Stringer left Street News when he was offered a book contract and when he wanted to get clean.

"I got tired of the crack thing," he said.

Stringer's Grand Central Winter is wonderful tribute to the survival of people who get off the streets. It details, void of romance and shame, the stories of a man who while on the cusp of destruction, remained a believer in the good of humanity. Case in point is his description of a time when he was hard up for a hit, but had no money and all the dealers were under the shadows of a police sweep. He saw a man, drunk out of his mind, struggling to open his apartment door. The guy could barely stand. Lee was desperate, so he approached the man and offered his help, but certainly was more interested in what was in the man's pockets than he was in helping the stranger. He felt in the man's pockets and his fingers found "a wad as thick as a slab of meat, enough to keep me buzzed for days." But he didn't do it. He couldn't do it, as desperate as he was. "One look at the guy's face close up and all I could see was sodden, vague misery there."

As Kurt Vonnegut states in the Forward of the book, Stringer "is not embittered", rather he is richer. Of course no one would choose outright to live a life of drug addiction and crime on the streets, but once you're in that situation it's obvious that you have to make the best of it and hopefully get out of it.

The hope appears early in Stringer's tales of the streets. He knew he wanted to write. It was something that without reason or explanation found its way into his heart.

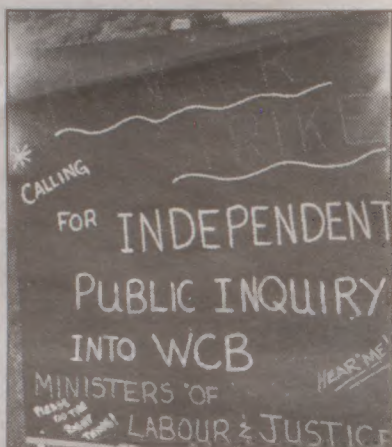
He writes-

I had the writing bug. After that there were four things I did every day. Hustle up money, cop some stuff, beam up, and write. And in the end I wound up dropping the other three.

What a World!!

by Charlie Meadows

Hello there good folks. Hope the world is treating you well and if it is you sure the hell aren't an injured worker in Alberta. This past month, an injured worker, Frank Pagnotta, locked himself to the front of the Workers Compensation Board office in downtown Edmonton and engaged in a hunger strike. He was then joined by friends and other injured workers who have been given the shaft by the WCB. As I write this article, there is tent town of protesters established on the WCB's green grass and the cops are trying to move them out. So why is this happening? Well injured workers in Alberta, for the past number of years, have been demanding and independent inquiry into why so many people are being driven into poverty by the WCB. When someone gets hurt on the job and they can't work, it's a good idea to take care of them until they can work again. But why would we have an organization in place for that purpose if that organization



doesn't believe in that purpose. There are so many voices screaming out, saying "I've been screwed by the WCB." If you phone any MLA's constituency office in Alberta, you'll find that WCB complaints top the list of caseload demands. It's kind of like buying a homeless person a sandwich, but you eat it yourself in front of him and then you kick him in the ass. The WCB has lots of money so where does it go. It goes to highly paid medical advisors, who say that injured workers are not really injured, according to Frank Pagnotta. They don't care about injured workers," he says. We know a lot of it goes to Mary Cameron, the WCB CEO, who gets paid \$211,000 yearly plus bonuses.

Nancy Saul Demeres, Communication Director for the WCB says "there is very low claim denial and that most injured workers are satisfied." Well if most workers are satisfied why would so many of them decide to camp out in front of the WCB offices. Is it because, since campsites in Alberta were privatized, they've become too expensive, so the next best alternative is downtown grassy areas. What a joke!

On a less tragic note, John F. Kennedy Jr. is dead. I find it amazing that his death got much more attention than the death of Michel Trudeau, you know Pierre Trudeau's son. He drowned in a B.C. lake last winter. What is this ridiculous loyalty and categorical lust we extend to rich Americans? It baffles me. Michel Trudeau was the son of one our Prime Ministers, but there were no churches dedicating their Sunday services to him like they did to JFK Jr. Maybe

Michel was a better skier than JFK Jr. was a pilot so he deserved less pity. Who knows! What I do know however, is that this JFK thing was no accident as most people are lead to believe. If you ask me, it was WeiBo Ludwig who shot down his plane. Think about it!



One final bit of madness. A poor lady walks into a government office because she is need of AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped.) Her handicap is that she has Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and she makes the AISH worker aware of this. The AISH worker immediately demanded to know when she came down with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. It's good to know the poor and disadvantaged are in such capable hands.

What a world!

From the Michael Moore newsletter

I'm happy to report to you that our television show, "The Awful Truth," has just been nominated for a Prime Time Emmy Award as "Outstanding Non Fiction Series." This is our 3rd Emmy nomination in as many seasons as we've been allowed on TV. The first two were for "TV Nation" (and one of those years we actually won).

The credit for this honour goes to our great staff and crew who often put themselves at great risk to bring you these stories. Thanks to all of them and to Bravo for their support.

"The Awful Truth" is now past the half-way mark in its "encore run" on Bravo on Sundays at 9pmET/10pmPT. The ratings are up 50%.

*****THIS JUST IN*****

As I was writing this letter, I looked on the TV screen and saw the photo of the man who shot the people at the Jewish Community Center in L.A.. He is the same man we filmed in our "Love Night" segment on TV Nation in 1995. His name is Buford Furrow.

In this segment, we went to a Nazi/Klan/Skinhead "convention" in Idaho. We took a group of young dancers to dance to Motown songs outside their compound. It was perhaps the scariest segment we ever

filmed for the show. At one point, the Nazis, including Furrow, came down the road toward the young girls with "siege heil!" salutes and headbutted our camera.

Buford Furrow, the man who has admitted to the L.A. shootings, was the first Nazi we encountered at the entrance to the gathering. He refused to let our reporter into the compound because he "didn't look white." Oddly, he was one of the more "mild-mannered" Nazis we shot that weekend.

It was shocking to see him on the screen just seconds ago. I will put that segment on our web site later today so you can log on to see and hear Mr. Furrow.

<http://www.michaelmoore.com>

I have spent the first half of the summer doing an experimental show on Channel 4 in the UK. It's live from New York at 11:30pm British time. Channel 4 gave me this time these past six weeks because I wanted to try something new.

Well, at the risk of getting lots of letters wanting to know how you can see this thing (you can't, it's only on in the British Isles), I promise you that, like "The Awful Truth," these shows will soon find their way to home video.

Here are some of the things we did on the show:

1) We made a random call to a real estate agent in Belgrade and, for \$3,300, I became a Serbian land owner (property values had plummeted for some rea-

son) and tried to put a Starbucks on it;

2) We sent a group of African Americans to a New York Police station to clean the windshields of the patrol cars the day a judge found a police officer innocent after he shot a man who was using a squeegee on his window;

3) Staged a concert in front of Wal Mart featuring the music from albums banned by

Wal Mart (Sheryl Crow, Beck, John Mellencamp) because Wal Mart, the largest seller of CD's in the country, disapproves of certain lyrics, cover art or political points of view expressed on the albums;

4) We took the "Poorest Man in the World" (there was actually a one-billion way tie) to congratulate the "Richest Man in the World," Bill Gates, the week his net worth topped \$100 billion;

5) We conducted a telethon for General Augusto Pinochet, who is being held by the British awaiting extradition to Spain to be tried as a mass murderer. We raised a total of 224 pounds for the former dictator which will get him a change of underwear and upgrade him from cargo to first-class on his trip to Madrid.

There's lots more, and the good news is we can't wait to get started on a new season of "The Awful Truth."

Yours,

Michael Moore

Notice

Provincial Injured Worker's Coalition Society.

My name is Frank Pagnotta. I was on a hunger strike to protest the Worker's Compensation Board's policies and unfair treatment of injured workers.

Since I began the Hunger Strike on July 25, 1999, I have been joined by fellow injured workers Ralph Teed and Tony Locke. We will continue our protest, but need your support.

If Premier Ralph Klein and his ministers won't listen to us, maybe they will listen to the public. Give them a call and see what they have to say.

Premier Ralph Klein: 427-2251
Clint Dunford, Human Resources/Labour Minister: 415-4800.

WE NEED A PUBLIC INQUIRY IN THE W.C.B.

For more information on how the W.C.B. denies benefits to workers, visit this website:

<http://www.compumart.ab.ca/gmcmullan>

Changes, changes, changes...

In this wild and wacky business of running a street sold magazine, **Our Voice** has yet again decided it is time to change gears, you know mix things up a bit. As we continue to strive for what is absolutely the best thing for the people who stand out on the street and sell this publication, we find ourselves learning that we'll never stop learning, hence the changes keep coming.

It has been the philosophy of **Our Voice** since its inception to always consider the vendors first and foremost when making any decision, no matter how small. They are the reason **Our Voice** exists. We have said this many times and we will continue to say it. This project has saved lives and will continue to save lives and its ability to do so is contingent on our will to acknowledge the importance of the people who you buy this magazine from and on their devotion and commitment to improving their lives and making a contribution to their communities.

Just a couple of years ago, **Our Voice** distributed magazines to vendors out of a small office in the drop-in centre of the Bissell Centre. It was a room that on almost every moment of every day was filled with our vendors, drinking coffee, sharing stories, laughing, confiding and feeling at home. They had a place. It was like a clubhouse if you will.

At that time **Our Voice** was looked upon primarily as an employment opportunity for people who found themselves marginalized in anyway and that certainly was the case. It remains true today. So to make the office more efficient and more manageable, it was moved upstairs and combined with the Bissell Centre's Casual Labour program, which provides temporary labour to people who come to the Centre. No longer was it a clubhouse or a place where people, who sold **Our Voice**, could come, relax, have a coffee, a cigarette and tell the tales of selling the magazine. We realized that what we had done was diminish the community that

had formed, a community that was vital to the strength of the project. We had taken away a major pipeline to the voices that are **Our Voice(s)**.

But as of this September 1 we have finally re-established our intent to rebuild that community, to once again provide that place where our vendors can come and feel like 'this is where they belong'. It is a place of openness and friendship, where the weariest seller of this great magazine can rest his tired hands about a warm cup of coffee and when the time is right, share his or her voice with the world.

Our Voice would like to thank Patty Kennedy, who has worked with our vendors for the past two years. Her kindness and generosity have been wonderful. All of us involved with **Our Voice** wish her the best.

And we would like to welcome Natasha Robinson as the new Distribution Coordinator.

Also **Our Voice** would like welcome Jason Harley, who also begins on September 1. Jason will be in charge of the all important revenue hunting. He will take care of advertising and fund raising for **Our Voice**. We would like to thank Dan Hague for selling the advertising for this issue.

So we have a new distribution office here at Bissell Centre, two great new people working with us, but the same old mission. That is to keep providing a quality magazine for the vendors to sell on the street so they can continue climbing toward and maintaining their independence. And I'm sure that somewhere down this road, there will be more changes yet.

To those of you who continue to buy **Our Voice**, we thank you sincerely and please if you have any comments or suggestions, as our valued readers, please call us anytime.

Edmonton welcomes its street paper brothers and sisters in 2000

Recently I traveled to Cleveland, Ohio to the 4th annual North American Street Newspaper Association

Editorial OPINION

Our Voice

the spare change magazine

conference. Gathered there were representatives from close to seventy other street sold publications from across North America. We were there to discuss and strengthen an anti-poverty movement that is now growing into its fifth year.

NASNA is an organization that exists to act as a support and play a leadership role in maintaining the sustainability of all street related publications as well as working with those communities without a street paper, to start one.

From formerly homeless, to still homeless, to people who just believe in the cause, the conference was attended by some of the most interesting and dedicated people I've ever met in my life. They are people devoted unquestionably to finding solutions to the serious problems causing poverty and challenging those who believe poverty is not a concern of society.

The existence of NASNA gives hope to this battle we are engaged in. **Our Voice** is proud to be a member of NASNA and this past July in Cleveland, we made a bid to host the 2000 conference here in Edmonton. After staring down some fierce competition, we were selected to host next years conference and without a doubt we know we can do a great job, both in terms of continuing to strengthen NASNA as a poverty fighting tool and in entertaining the visitors.

Our Voice and the Bissell Centre look forward to welcoming some of the biggest hearts and hardest working people to our digs next July. ♦

Michael Walters.

LITERACY IS AN ART

It is difficult to be illiterate. Lacking the skill "is like being blind", and leads to similar economic effects. But the illiterate are very capable, and the acquisition of the skill is an art practised by both student and teacher.

Up to the 1960s, educators told us that the illiterate were genetically inferior. Nowadays, economists have come to understand that a literate population is more productive, and our government supports literacy projects. However, it is still the fringe agencies who do the best job of it, such as John Howard Society's Alternative Program (ALP).

My mother went to adult education at Alberta Vocational College (AVC), after the age of 40. She had never been in a school, yet had a goal of reading a Grade 10 level romance novel about China. She was kicked out after several years for not progressing fast enough in their grade system.

She was devastated. She said, "I guess it's because I'm stupid!" I protested, "How can you be stupid if you had me? I have a high I.Q.!" However, genetics have little to do with literacy: learning styles do.

The literacy organisation, Project Adult Literacy Society (PALS) stopped sending Mother a volunteer tutor after 1992. She is 71 years old now, and may never reach her goal.

PALS and the John Howard Society's Alternative Literacy Program (ALP) stick with a student. Different from AVC, they are client-centred. At John Howard, they have a general mandate to help prevent crime. That means that they will help anyone, because illiteracy causes crime.

They innovate until they find the special mix of

I WANTED TO BE AN ARTIST. BUT I DROPPED OUTTA SCHOOL...

I FIGURED AS MUCH -- JUDGING FROM YOUR SPELLING...



learning styles that suits the student, be it visual, auditory or kinaesthetic. They laud the student for their other skills, such as hand skills. They provide small classes, goal setting, volunteer tutors, peer tutors, paid teachers, access to computers, and even a mascot dog named Spirit who comforts anyone.

The illiterate are highly motivated, because "illiteracy" means they are "functionally illiterate", that is, at Level 1 or 2 on a scale of 1-5. They cannot read a manual, fill in an application form, read a transit guide, or balance a chequebook.

This leads to horrific economic and social effects. The illiterate are over twice as likely to be in jail and three times as likely to be unemployed. Fortunately, the government recognises this and sponsors many adult learning programs. Nowadays, 40% of adults are in some sort of adult education or training program. Half of those are sponsored by employers themselves. That leaves the illiterate out again, because they do not have the good job perks.

"Human capital investment" is a despicable term used to describe our reason for putting tax dollars into literacy. It reduces a person to a nameless economic cipher, supposedly valuable only if he or she works. However, if the government funds literacy programs which sustain the entire person, that is ultimately acceptable.

As Shirley Sandul, of PALS, says, "Literacy is just a skill. Everyone is capable of it." Places such as PALS or ALP add literacy to the whole person, giving you a good worker and person. To those institutions, having the student set goals is important to creating self-esteem. Most students lack self-esteem when they first come in. Some are angry and defensive, having had to explain their inability for so many years. The student testimonials, recorded by Colleen Ascher and Judy Murphy of ALP, speak well of their approach.

"If I wasn't here, I would be on the street," wrote Chris Crowley.

"I'm overwhelmed at the progress I am making," says Edwin, a poet and former street person.

"I am proud when I go shopping and do not have to ask for help from sales clerks," says a lady student.

Literacy is fun, profitable and highly recommended. Acquiring it is an art which can help the whole student. ♦

Kassandra Caldwell

Dramatizing critical reality

Dr. Joe Clouthier leads the way at the Inner City High School

BY LINDA DUMONT.

When asked about the his recent Salute to Excellence Award he received from the city in June, Dr. Joe Clouthier, principal of the Inner City High School couldn't recall exactly what the award was called. He said he had been to the Winspear Centre for a nice lunch and got "a plaque and a handshake" because some anonymous person nominated him for an award.

Clouthier was far more enthusiastic when speaking about his work with inner city kids than about his award. He is president of the Boyle Street Community League and Principal of Inner City High, but is best known for his work with drama groups using popular theatre.

Clouthier started working with kids as a volunteer at the Boys and Girls Club in 1980 when he was doing a wood working program.

In 1983 he went to university to become a teacher. He said he wondered how he would fit in at the university since he grew up in an inner city environment and was very shy. In his first year, he enrolled in a drama course. That proved to be a turning point in his life.

"It was like jumping into the deep end of the pool. Some people just blossomed in it," said Clouthier, "I thought it (drama) would be a good way to work with inner city youth."

Clouthier said for many of the children in inner city schools, closing oneself off is a survival skill. He saw drama as a way to reach these kids.

After Clouthier graduated, he completed two placements as a student teacher. He was disappointed by the experience.

"What I saw taking place was not helpful for the

students," said Clouthier, "The teachers I was working with didn't have a sensitivity to where the students were coming from."

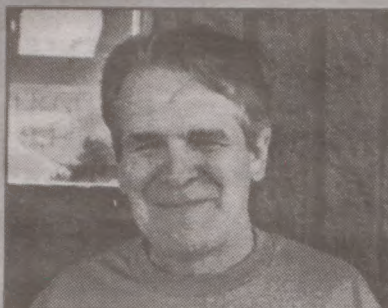
Clouthier left the schools thinking he could do more for the students working in the community than in the school system. He started drama groups at Alex Taylor school and at the Boys and Girls Club. Through drama, he was able to create an atmosphere of trust where students who were inarticulate could speak by using theatre.

When he returned to university to study for his Doctor of Education degree in 1987, Clouthier discovered popular theatre. It seemed like the ideal tool to work with. By then he had groups for teens as well as drama groups for younger children.

Popular theatre deals with real life situations. Through dealing with issues that they found difficult to speak about, students created scenes from their own experiences. These could be either happy or sad. They then found a critical moment. Many of the topics chosen dealt with sexual abuse to violence and substance abuse or other trauma as the critical moment. The students were asked to create the scene before and the scene after the critical moment, then change the first scene to what they would like it to be. Through doing that, the students realized there are choices to be made and that they have the power to make those choices.

One of the drama groups decided to take the issues they were dealing with out to the community. Since then, the popular theatre groups have performed throughout Alberta at conferences, cultural camps and even the Fringe. At the end of each performance, there is a discussion between the audience and the students.

Clouthier continued working with the students. Some of his drama students were growing up. They



Dr. Joe Clouthier

didn't have a permanent place to live, so he rented a house on 108th Avenue. They had food and shelter there.

With their basic needs met, the youth were able to look to the future and saw education as important.

"We set up a tutoring service in our office," said Clouthier.

That was the beginning of Inner City High. The students asked him to start a school.

In November, 1992, Clouthier asked to use space at the Boyle Street Community Hall. He explained that they had no money. In fact, it was costing Clouthier money for bus fares and other things the youth needed.

"February, 1993 we opened with seven students from our drama group and two of their friends," said Clouthier, "We were a certified private school."

When changes were made to the welfare system in 1993, the school ran into problems. Because they were a private school, the students could no longer qualify for social assistance while attending. Clouthier appealed and the Department of Social Service agreed to continue to fund the students while he negotiated with the school boards.

Inner City High is now an Edmonton Catholic School. They have regular scheduled classes and follow the Alberta curriculum with strong emphasis on academics so the students are prepared for college entrance. There are 60 students, Clouthier, five staff and a youth worker.

Clouthier said receiving the Salute to Excellence award would not have been possible without the dedicated staff of Inner City High. Alexina Dalgetty is a trained play write who has worked with Clouthier since 1990. Elan Properzi came to work at Inner City High on a grant during her second year of university, then volunteered her time. She has been with the school for three years since graduating. Janice Fehr is the art teacher and Lance Marty, who was a drama group member, is the youth worker. ♦

Scaring the disabled

by Kasandra Caldwell

"L" is on Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH), and chooses to remain anonymous, because he is afraid of reprisals from Social Services.

He does not look well. He is skinny, sallow, his eyes are always large, round, and hangdog looking. He silently begs all viewers not to hurt him. He is so dumbed out from drugs for his mental illness that his whole body is slowed to a crawl. The ambulance comes to his building to save him from his regular suicide attempts. He has very little basic furniture, and his apartment is filthy.

On a recent radio phone in show, Premier Klein insisted that Lyle Oberg, past Minister of Family and Social Services, (and has since moved on to become Learning Minister) is "really a very kind man". It is dismaying that our leaders need to see the AISH clients wiggle and scream on the streets before they act with compassion. This reflects repulsive fiscal voyeurism and mean spiritedness.

Bev Mathiesson, Executive Director of Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD), admits that "AISH clients are afraid to speak out", because only recently the Government threatened to reduce AISH to welfare levels.

Brian Laird, also of ACCD, is an armless man who has worked at ACCD for many years. The ACCD has a reputation for being the most active proponent of the rights of the disabled. However, sometimes Brian takes a critical view of AISH recipients.



Brian Laird from the ACCD.

Brian Laird warns that the ACCD dislikes "radical" people for complaining about AISH rates and regulations, and one cannot use words like "slave labourers" to describe AISH recipients and their parents. His conciliatory approach apparently works best with this government. Yet he admits that our current government lacks "compassion and commitment".

As for belaboured parents of the disabled, he concedes that, "nowadays, the government philosophy is a family unit looking after its own. There is no longer an attitude of giving the disabled an independent income". However, many mentally ill developed their severe disabilities out of the severe abuse from their own families. Where do they go for a "family unit"?

Brian thinks that AISH recipients got themselves into a public relations bind by asking for too much

and offering too little "responsibility": they want "equality" in access to work, apparently denies the right to have an independent income. When prompted, though, Brian recalls that 99% of AISH clients can never work, and therefore need a decent pension income.

Both Bev and Brian are concerned that AISH parents are being required to "account for the basics" these days. 10 years ago, when AISH was enough to live on, they were not.

Brian also says of AISH clients, "It's their own fault if they don't report income and get cut off". However, he feels that single AISH clients definitely lack enough to live on, and also need work incentives to earn extra money.

Brian is candid about his own fear about speaking out against AISH policies. He says that "AISH has been known to retaliate" against those who complain. Ultimately, though, he does believe that the social worker is blameless. "Unless the government speaks on behalf of pensioned disabled, no one will".

There are few government leaders to take a stand for an independent AISH income. The last politician who was able to get a decent income for AISH clients was Percy Wickman, and he is retiring. He says that there is no one to take his place, and that "the public" must demand that this government take better of the disabled.

Since AISH clients cannot speak for themselves, hopefully, some of their parents will. As Brian Laird says, "I've given my name openly to encourage others. If I get cut off, I want you to take responsibility for covering that openly, too." ♦

Patricia can read a story to her son. She can fill out job application forms. She can read her own mail. She can order from a menu. She couldn't do any of this when she first came to the Project Adult Literacy Society (PALS) program 3 years ago.

Patricia is one of six PALS students who had been labeled 'learning disabled' at an early age (the other 151 dropped out of school prior to completing grade nine) and placed in a 'special education program' where she was moved upward from grade to grade without being allowed to fail.

"You don't fail a child," she says with some sarcasm, "it might spoil their self-esteem."

Upon reaching junior high, she was placed in a special education program where, "the classroom aide did all my work," she said.

"Even then you know how to manipulate the system," notes Shirley Sandul, PALS Executive Director.

Patricia was then placed in L.Y.Cairns Vocational High School and taught how to care for animals and children. After working for veterinary clinics and the zoo, she eventually opened up a licensed day-care but gave it up when she became concerned that she might administer the wrong medications to the children she cared for. "I couldn't read the labels on the bottles," she said, "and just went by the colour of the pills."

"Every non-reader develops a strategy to cope with their situation," says Sandul. Patricia's was to develop a prodigious memory, and to rely on her mother to



Tutor Dianne (left) and student Patricia work on a session in the PALS office.

Patricia can read and life is better with PALS

BY R.H. MACLACHLAN

read to her. In grade 11/12 she took first aid, with her mother reading her the textbook, which she memorized. She got the highest mark in the class. Getting her driver's license meant memorizing road signs and paying an additional \$20 fee for an oral exam.

"Since I was paying that extra money, I was determined to pass," she said -and she did.

Other non-readers develop other coping strategies--shopping for groceries by buying packages which have pictures on the labels, pretending to study the menu and then ordering the special, pretending they

have forgot their glasses and asking others to read things for them.

Patricia's tutor is Dianne, who's been volunteering with PALS for 5 years now. Dianne got interested in PALS while working as a career counselor, where she found that many of her clients did not know how to read. She had to find places for them to learn. Not all of them were looking for minimum-wage jobs, either.

"At that point in my life I was looking at doing something meaningful....because I have always been a reader I felt that people who could read could do anything. So I felt if I could teach someone how to read it would be meaningful," she said. "I had no way of knowing how meaningful it would be for me personally."

The PALS general literacy program (the organization also offers an English as a second language program) has students ranging from 18 to 70 years of age. 60% are male, and between 50% and 60% are employed and all read below a functional level (their reading skills do not meet the demands of daily living).

About 36% of the adult population of Alberta fall into this category, Sandul says. "Reading is a skill which must be continually practiced," she adds. "If you don't use it, you'll lose it."

I take the point of view that everyone can learn to read," says Dianne, "It's just determining the right learning style for the individual." ♦

READ
Literacy & Literature

Art in the Urban Jungle

by Heather Slade

On July 21 a unique event took place in Edmonton's downtown at Beaver Hills House Park. The event, organized by Dean Long, the Program Assistant at Latitude 53, carried the theme of "The Urban Jungle". Latitude 53's mandate is to encourage contemporary and experimental art practices. In the spirit of this creative freedom,

the concept of Animate, a series of performance nights, was born.

The "Urban Jungle" theme includes experiences with city living, urban communities and corresponding social issues. In keeping with this theme, all monies received at the performance were donated to the Bissell Centre. It was a tangible portrayal of how artists can strengthen the community in which they exist.

The first of the three artists to perform their work was Travis McEnery. His work has a gritty, authentic quality to it. His short story is set in Edmonton, and is complete with city landmarks such as Whyte Ave and the river valley. His story was unpretentious and engaging.

The next performer was Dave Dutton-Fraser. His bio includes 10 years of writing professionally and mentorship by W.O. Mitchell. His story was preceded by a light poetic offering. This, he explained, might offset some of the darker aspects of his story. His characters were memorable, one in particular, "a street waif", named Sam. Her declaration, in this twisted Pygmalion tale, was that she "feels power when some-

one lifts their nose at me", as she put it.

Phillip Jagger was the third performer of the evening.

Proceeds from the first performance on June 30th were donated to WIN House, a battered women's shelter.

The proceeds from the August 18th performance are going toward a festival called "Visualeyez" which is a project of Latitude 53 and will take place in February of 2000.

Of course, there are expenses involved in undertakings of this kind, both the organizers at Latitude 53 and Bissell Centre wish to thank the many kind sponsors. They include the performers themselves: Travis McEnery, Dave Dutton-Fraser, and Phillip Jagger and the organizational efforts of Dean Long and Dave LaRiviere, as well as all the people who attended the event and donated money and non-perishable food items. Local businesses and artists in the community were also influential in making this evening a success.

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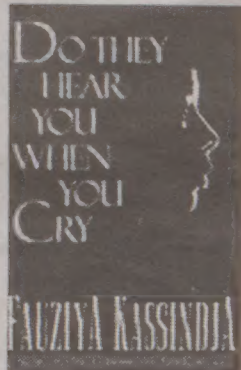
fringe theatre school



The Love of Literature



Regular Our Voice writers tell you about books you should read



"Do They Hear You When You Cry"

Fauziya Kassindja

"Do They Hear You When You Cry" by Fauziya Kassindja is the autobiographical story of a young woman's passage through fire and then through hell. Help from virtual strangers and her faith in God pulled her out the other side. Fauziya's story is both an astounding tale of human endurance and a call to action in support of women's basic human rights. Through her honest and forthright narrative, Fauziya pulled me into both her heart and her circumstances. I was humbled by the strength of this young woman who survived the trials she faced.

Fauziya Kassindja was born in Togo, West Africa.

She grew up in a loving, supportive family. Although her immediate family followed traditional tribal and Muslim ways, they were also modern, discarding customs that were not respectful to all members of the family.

When Fauziya was sixteen, her world came crashing down around her. While she was away at boarding school, her father died. As was law, all of his property, which included his wife and underage children, was given to his family. The family had very traditional views. They banished Fauziya's mother from the village, stopped Fauziya's schooling, sold her into marriage to a man three times her age with three other wives and consented to her circumcision.

Although she had no legal right to do so, Fauziya's older sister helped Fauziya escape to Germany. From there she flew to the United States and upon landing, applied for asylum.

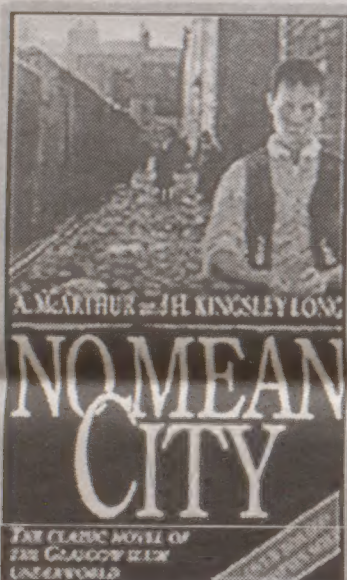
Fauziya spent the next sixteen months in maximum security prisons, living in inhumane conditions. She was told she was a liar by officials, getting yelled at and belittled by an immigration judge and often

being treated worse than the prisoners she was quartered with. Her plea for asylum was based on the fact that if she were sent back to Togo, she would, by law, be married to her husband and undergo female genital mutilation.

With each triumph Fauziya experienced, I felt joy for her. With each setback she suffered I silently cursed immigration justice. When I began reading this book, I expected most of her story to be centered around her life in Togo and the repression she suffered there. However, only a quarter of the story takes place in Togo and involves her peaceful life before her father's death. This challenged my culturally biased views. Most of her pain and many of her trials came from a sexist, racist immigration system.

Fauziya's story should be essential reading for anyone who holds any opinion on immigration to North America. "Do They Hear You When You Cry" provides an opportunity to see immigration from an insiders perspective.

by Rebecca Lipplatt-Long



No Mean City

Alexander McArthur

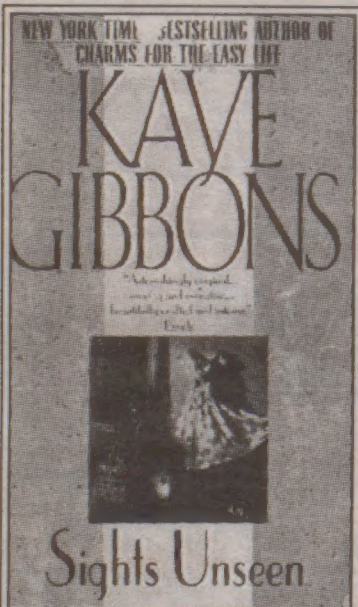
Throughout the early and mid part of the century, Glasgow, Scotland was one of the rougher places to live in the western world. Pummeled by economic hardship, overcrowded due to immigration by highland Scots and penniless Irish on either side of the religious debate, Glasgow was simply overwhelmed. In the rougher parts of the city such as the notorious Gorbals, razor gangs and criminals ran

rampant, terrorizing the honest poor. Alcohol exacerbated the situation; a companion to the writer Sinclair Lewis noted in a diary of their trip to Scotland, that Men, woman and children were fighting in the dirty streets; gin drinking charwoman were lying helplessly in the gutters and alleys. There were over 120 pubs in a 300 acre area, as many as 14 on a street. 50,000 people were squeezed into this slum.

It was in this milieu that Alexander McArthur wrote his infamous book on Glasgow and the Gorbals, No Mean City. I found a battered copy in my early teens in a used bookstore. Dimly aware that my dad was from Glasgow, and attracted to the organized crime overtones, (a Scottish Godfather!) I scooped it up. It proved hard to understand in some instances. Like Trainspotting, it was written partially in a Glasgow accent, and full of archaic language. It was also irresistible. I only later found out how residents found it to be an overdramatized and lurid account. To me, it was great. Written like an old potboiler, it focused on the razor gangs of its time, and the effects on the dirt poor residents, but it also emphasized an awareness of

the communal feeling among the poor inhabitants, kind of like a non political Steinbeck writing about the Okies. The main focus may have been the criminal gangs that ruled the streets, but it also treated the poor residents of the Gorbals as human beings, not as ciphers (although certainly stereotyped "good" and "bad" poor). As over the top as the situations in the book were, they were based on true events, and the writer took care to reveal the conditions in the slum, and in the city as a whole. The characters are exaggerated, but reveal a warmth and basic dignity that I found very attractive. No great work of literature, and certainly not the most perfect representation of poverty and its causes, No Mean City has a vitality and exuberance that allowed me to see the world in much less narrow terms than my fourteen year old mind was used to. It was so powerful that it set up a view of Glasgow around the world that has still not been totally shaken off.

by Tom Murray



"Manic Mommy" Sights Unseen

Kaye Gibbons

Sights Unseen is a novel, for anyone who has suffered with mental illness in themselves or those they love. It articulates the

experience with poignant accuracy, despite being a work of fiction. It is clear that author, Kaye Gibbons knows her subject well. She has created characters that are believable. We are led into the private world of a proud, yet fractured Southern family. This story is at once about the relationship of a mother and a daughter and about the destructive vortex of a broken

mind on all those close to it.

The primary character is the narrator, Hattie. Her very existence has its roots in her mother, Maggie's, illness. In an attempt to battle depression, Maggie conceives Hattie, assuming this will make her happy. But, as Hattie would later say, "From early on I sensed that her maternal instincts were jammed".

She was not alone in feeling robbed of normalcy. Her older brother, Freddy, is frequently blamed for his mother's "spells", as they came to be known. Where the daughter tries to be the "good" child, in a futile effort to keep her mother sane, Freddy is openly hostile as he struggles with puberty and his mothers' embarrassing behavior.

Another character who figures prominently in Hattie's life is the black maid "Pearl". She becomes a mother figure to both the children and their equally needy parents. Pearl's role is vital in keeping the exhausted father from a mental breakdown of his own. Her practical nature and simple way of looking at things provides some comic relief.

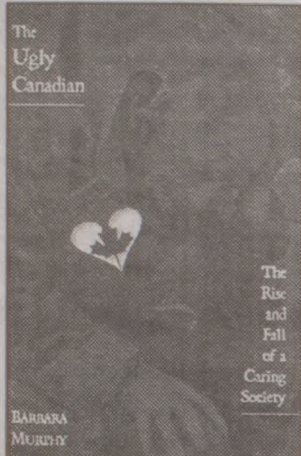
One last character deserves mention. He is Maggie's father-in-law, Mr. Barnes. He is attracted to Maggie by the very things that signal her sickness. When she is manic she is fun, adventurous and just a

bit dangerous, not like the women he is used to in the prim and proper South. He enjoys her effusive energy. It makes him feel more alive. In her darker moments, he is still drawn to her, but this time as a protector. He feels needed. So, in this way, they feed each other emotionally.

"Like a vaguely irritable ghost of uncertain origins" is how Hattie, the little girl, sees her mother. Finally, when the girl is 12, her mother receives treatment, including shock therapy and lithium. For Maggie, this is a time of painful self-realization, and strives "to be good, like a child before Christmas". For Hattie, her brother and her father, it is with a "mixture of wariness and eagerness" that they view this new medicated woman. They are still unsure of just who the real Maggie might be. In time, Hattie grows up and is able to see her mother differently, not with demands and blame. Instead, she has compassion and understanding of the pain they have all experienced.

Sights Unseen is more than a story about mental illness or its effects. It is about the miracle of forgiveness and healing. If you need an infusion of hope, this is just what the psychiatrist ordered.

by Heather Slade



The Ugly Canadian Barbara Murphy

The Ugly Canadian is a non-fiction book about social justice and its decline. Barbara Murphy, the author, is a former Winnipegger who now works in Ottawa as a social consultant. She chronicles the twentieth century in Canada and shows how the voting public has lost its compassion and in doing so has been the influential factor in social policy which affects the poor.

According to Murphy, we take pride in our toughness now as we did at the start of the century and not in our generous social policies.

At the turn of the century we thought helping people would reduce their incentive to work. Our perception has moved from one of an increase in caring after the second world war to a decline in the mid-seventies.

"Our values change and the government responds to our wishes," says Murphy.

As at the turn of the century, concern about the economy and recently about welfare cheats and social spending became the major issues for the public. The large deficit created anger and the public looked for someone to blame.

"The 'culprits' were not hard to come up with and

social programs and the national debt were pinpointed as wasted spending even though studies attributed very little share of the deficit to social spending, somewhere around 1%.

"In the nineties, preoccupation of the Employment and Immigration Department with fraud was good news for Canadians who were lucky enough to have jobs and who were not entirely convinced that those without jobs deserved much sympathy."

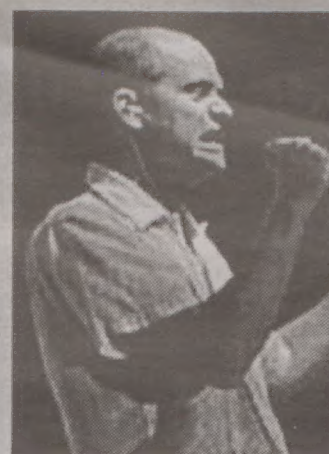
In the fall of 1993, the Alberta government reduced welfare benefits dramatically, cutting tens of thousands of people right off. They also reduced rent allowances by up to \$100. They did all this with the support of a large majority of Albertans.

According to an Edmonton Journal article by Linda Goyette; "The citizenry of this province hates poor people...They can't think of a punishment too severe, a humiliation too deep, for people on welfare...The employed sit in judgement like small Gods, squinting at the unemployed, asking: Are they deserving or undeserving? If these people can't pull up their bootstraps, well by damn, we'll give them a good, swift boot where it hurts."

Murphy's view on how we as the voting public care for the poor may not be popular, but it is convincing. The statement she makes is, "it is not big business, not the government to blame for an evident decline in care for the poor...it is the public...those who vote and have the power to put into office, politicians who merely listen to their constituents and do what they ask for."

The question Murphy's arguments raise is, "if the power to help the less fortunate lays with the average citizen and considering the state of our underprivileged, are we really the civilization we say we are?"

by Rodney Graham



Next Month in Our Voice

A discussion with Gordon Downey, lead singer of The Tragically Hip.

Has country music exchanged grassroots folk for the glamour of the bigtime? Well two local bands say no, at least two country bands haven't.

No room at the Inn. New city ordinances in the U.S. and now in Canada make it illegal for the homeless to sleep outside. It's a tent city bust.

From God to Buddha, the spirituality that lives in the souls of people on the street.



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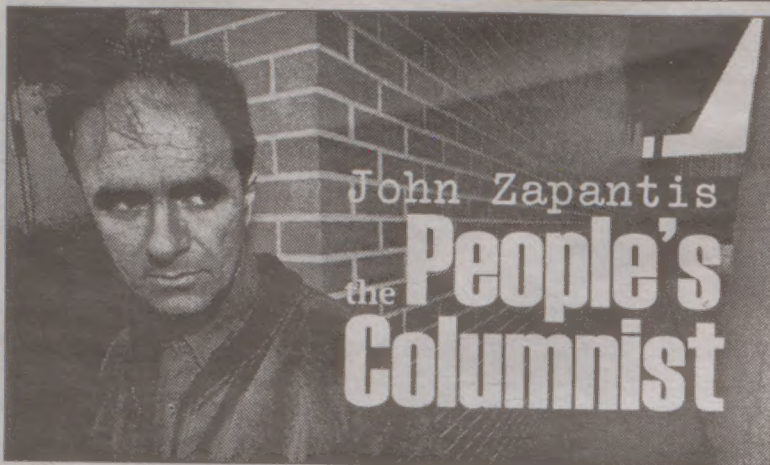
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John Zapantis the People's Columnist

How the power of prayer helped me off the hi-way.

It was the middle of September, 1993. I had my thumb in the air. I had been stranded on the hi-way between Innisfail and Red Deer for more than 2 hours. It was a cool fall evening. The sun had disappeared behind the prairie field horizon that was spread out in front of me.

It was around 10 p.m. My thumb was still patiently in the air. Cars continued to pass me by on the hi-way. I stood there in pitch darkness, hoping that some kind soul would take notice of me and immediately pull up and get me off this hi-way and home to Edmonton.

That was the night that I had made the important decision in my life to stop endlessly traveling around the country. I had been drifting for 3 years and had failed to find permanent employment. I had been homeless in practically every major city in Canada.

All I wanted was to move off the hi-way and back to Edmonton.

Then all at once thousands of mosquitoes started buzzing over my head as they circled around me in a reconnaissance flight.

Each of the mosquitoes came nose diving at me like a fleet of miniature fighter jets.

They aimed their natural weaponry and their stingers landed into my back. They began to celebrate like my body was a human smorgasbord. All I could do was persistently slap this air force of back biters from my skin.

I had now officially declared my war of Armageddon on them. The brigade of looting and feasting mosquitoes struggled to escape my strategic surprise attack. I inevitably claimed a number of casualties with my vengeful, giant, crushing hand. Still the attack was too much to bear.

I never believed in the power of prayer, but the thought of praying under these most dire circumstances seemed like a great idea.

"I ask oh heavenly Father, that if you care about my situation, that you prove your existence to me. I ask that you come into my life. I accept you as my saviour.

I ask oh heavenly Father that you take me off this hi-way."

Then, at that moment, I noticed a White 4 door Ford, late 70's model pull up right next to where I was standing.

The passenger door of the car flew open. I could hear what sounded like gospel music blaring from the car's radio.

The man inside the vehicle wore long shoulder length grey hair. He looked to be in his mid 50s.

"Have you accepted the word of the Lord?" the man jubilantly replied. He was obviously a Christian.

That was it! My prayer had been answered as God spoke through this person, using him as a spiritual tool. God had confirmed and answered my prayer.

I replied enthusiastically, "Yes I have. Praise the Lord!"

I was thinking to myself contentedly, "this is my ticket to heaven! This is my ticket to the Big Time!"

I immediately climbed into the man's vehicle, attesting to how the Lord had confirmed his powers to me, after praying to get off the hi-way.

The man quipped, "God works in mysterious ways!" Then he guided the car back out on to the hi-way and we headed north toward Edmonton.

I knew from that day on that life would inevitably change in my favour.

To this very day I rely on the power of prayer. The power of prayer is the fuel I'll always rely upon, no matter which hi-way I'm on. ♦

READ Literacy & Literature



Boyle Street High School focused on needs of community

BY CEC GARFIN

The Boyle Street Community Services Co-op's Charter High School in three years has grown to more than 200 students. The school operates 4 terms of eleven weeks each, with a week off between along with the whole month of August. The school's mission includes: Establishing expectations for citizenship, responsible behavior, respecting individual differences, nurturing self-worth and dignity and fostering further learning.

Priorities at Boyle Street Education Centre are as follows: Improving student achievements in the core sub-

jects. Achieving high standards of conduct, safety and wellness. Increase the availability and use of technology to improve student learning. Developing individual program plans that will address specific and individual student learning requirements.

Services that are offered by the school are the breakfast and lunch program prepared by Foods Class and earned transportation to and from school. There is a counselor for one-on-one intervention and outreach. Registered apprenticeship programs and work experience are utilized and students enjoy many guest speakers and field trips. Also offered is career and post secondary counseling, Native studies and Cree lessons - taught in conjunction with community members.

The school and its staff will advocate on behalf of students with numerous social service agencies, including Student Finance, CPP, Child Welfare Services, and Probation Officers/Fine Options. There is also a school nurse available for health counseling

along with immunization and communicable disease follow-ups.

The Charter School will ensure that all students have access to positive adult role models, be they parents, teachers or other community members.

They will tailor the students' education programs to their needs and make it relevant to their life experiences as well as make optimum use of flexible teaching methods.

They make use of learning experiences outside of the school setting - offer employment preparation workshops, job shadowing and job placement opportunities and offer credits for this.

As well they use early intervention and various support services to address the learning and social needs of the students.

The school also contains an Arts and Crafts Studio, which is an important element of the school. Students and community members work together on an array of projects including production of traditional fashions, making and repairing clothes, and fine art. Students are able to earn high school credits while community members are able to share and hone their skills.

For and additional information you can phone: (780)424-4106 ext.268, fax (780) 425-2205 or visit 10116-105 Avenue Edmonton, Alberta T5H 0K2.

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SRI SATHYA SAI BABA CENTRE OF EDMONTON

Wonderful stories captured by Learning Centre

Theresa McBryan

"Lifelong learning in all aspects of personal growth and community participation is the goal of The Learning Centre Literacy Association," according to facilitator Mary Norton. She told me that many adults because of lost opportunities in their youth find themselves with fewer options for educational opportunities as they get older. The Learning Centre's focus is on projects that involve participants in projects that use literacy and math skills in real life situations. They need this to participate in the larger community.

Mary Norton stresses that people at any stage of literacy development can learn more. Individuals who can tell wonderful stories about life may still have to learn how to write a business report or learn how to use a computer. Participants bring the riches of life experience to the program, nobody is starting from the beginning. This depth is evident in the centre's Annual Report where Marlene Kottke says that it was important for their group to understand that good

but the sincere thoughts that we express in the clearest way possible. The participants in another Learning Circle described their experiences in this way.

"When we tutored others in reading or on the computers we learned new skills ourselves. We worked out ideas and listened to others, that was how we learned co-operation and compromise. In the Art Program Geneva Moore reported that the group had arrived at the understanding that: Art making is not only about creating "beauty", but rather about personal empowerment, wisdom and wholeness."

The Centre encourages participants to say what they want and need in program development. In this way they can move beyond the memories of a rigid hierarchical school system which for some was not an empowering experience. There are different kinds of

READ
Literacy & Literature



programs to involve participants in the community such as Building Bridges to the Greater Community where Phyllis Steeves commented that, "volunteer responsibilities undertaken have encouraged personal growth among participants; giving back to the community helps to develop an individual's sense of self-worth."

Projects undertaken by the Centre involve active collaboration with a number of partners such as The University of Alberta, Faculty of Education in the Participatory Approaches Project. In this project, six literacy practitioners and groups of adult students are trying out participatory practices in their programs

Each participant and facilitator engaged in a participatory project, and each practitioner did research about the project. Two of the projects were at The Learning Centre. Both groups are working on books about their projects. In another project, Language and Literacy Learning Exchange, partnering with Community Cultures Institute, a program for students whose first language is not English, volunteers from The Learning Centre experienced a greater appreciation of different cultures- one's own included.

The Learning Centre publishes "The English Express", a newspaper that they put together with the Heritage club (retired postal workers). 37,000 copies are mailed out eight times a year around the world. Articles reprinted or adapted from "English Express" in 1998 became the English Express Reader which is a resource that will help adults learn to read English. In 1998, The Learning Centre also published "Learning

for our Health". They distributed 300 free copies of "Learning for our Health" to literacy programs and health agencies across Canada. Like Our Voice, these publications give a forum to individuals whose voices may not be heard in mainstream media.

With a mandate that moves beyond ease with the three R's, The Learning Centre involves participants and community partners in Art and Craft classes, Computer Literacy, Cooking Classes, work in Collective Kitchens and a Woman's Group. Participants use their skills in volunteer projects for The Learning

Centre as well as the greater community in their Fall Art Show and Tea, and Rummage sales. In 1998 they interacted with the public in a celebration of International Literacy Day at Edmonton's city hall. A second event, a Literacy Fair, was held at West Edmonton Mall. With partners P.A.L.S., The John Howard Society, Frontier College, and Students for Literacy at the U. of A., The Learning Centre, hosted a Spike for Literacy Volleyball tournament.

The mission of The Learning Centre is to engage people in community based learning and literacy development that further enables them to make positive changes for themselves and their communities. Volunteering help is always needed and appreciated. Some volunteers work one on one with individuals, some volunteer for special events. There were 2,915 volunteer hours donated last year. The Learning Centre received ten computers from the "Computer for Schools" program. Costs for participants in the day program are covered by bursary, evening costs are nominal, basically coffee money which can be waived depending on circumstances. If you have something you wish to share with this program the address is:

The Learning Centre Literacy Association #200,
10116 - 105 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
T5J 0K2
Phone: (780) 429 - 0675 Fax: (780) 425 - 2205
Email: leamingcentre@compusmart.ab.ca

No back to school clothes

by Art Piche

There is a magnificent building in downtown Edmonton with glass elevators. Going up makes a person feel like they're going somewhere, but once you hit the sixth floor there is a downside. Especially if you're a treaty number (native). They are unsure where to send you.

Recently I went into the reception area with my school age children inquiring about new clothing so they can attend school with pride and joy. Both of my children are status. My son will be in grade 5 and my daughter passed into grade eight. Both are doing excellent in school. My babies are growing every day and they outgrow their clothes at a fast pace. My son does not mind wearing hand me downs, but my daughter will not touch them and I want the best for her. She is twelve years old and her goal is to be a lawyer and I will encourage her to reach these attain-

able steps.

As well I have to worry about bus passes every month, because they are now twenty four dollars each and we live an hour from their schools. I was advised to call 'Cold Lake First Nations for such necessities.

What a joke! When I phoned the Rez., they told me that this big office always tells people to get in touch with their reserves. They went on to say that they do not help off reserve treaty Indians. So here I am with school drawing nearer and no help for my children.

As natives and a human beings in this country we have rights, but it seems like these rights are pushed aside and forgotten, or they don't want to be heard. It seems like natives get the low end of the stick and we have to fight twice as hard just to be heard.

One of our rights is medical and based on the way it stands, it's a farce. One prime example is my daughter's teeth. A year ago I took her to see an orthodontist, who in turn, is waiting for Indian Affairs to give him

the green light and we are still waiting. When my daughter needed glasses, Indian Affairs came up with \$164 and I came up with the rest, which amounted to \$120. This money is big hit out of our grocery money and I don't smile when I have to approach the food bank.

It sounds like I'm crying and I am crying and we all know that if people don't cry, we will never be heard. Do you ever wonder why so many of our brothers and sisters die on the streets of Edmonton, or any other urban areas in this country? It is because they gave up the will to go on. There are just too many barriers to knock down. Many get discouraged and never come back. How many of you have heard the phrase, "the only good Indian is a dead Indian!" Well this is one aboriginal who will not go down without a fight. I've made it through the worst years of my life. Before 1991, I spent eighteen years on skidrow. I have beat the odds and I have to keep fighting the odds to make a home for my family. I have no choice.



poems

The poetry
of
Betty Nordin



THE BAR

The bar is nearly empty.
There's only three-four people here.
I sit down and have a drink,
And as I sit my memory leaps to the good ol' days.
Or so I thought.

In the middle of the afternoon the place is
Busting at the seams.
At one end of the bar in a darkened corner,
Business is roaring for the working girls.
Everyone is happy.
Even the druggies and potheads are flying high.

The drag as we knew it was not the drag it is today.
We looked out for each other.
Today people look out for themselves.
There is so much anger and pain on the streets today.
Pardon me, what did you say?

As I looked around the bar, it's still the same;
Only different faces, different people
With the same anger, despair and pain
Of the streets of yesterday and today.

WING TIPS

All her life she heard,
Oh, she's an angel all right;
Only her wing tips are black.
With dignity and pride
She thrust her chin out and said,
I used to be an angel with black wing tips.
But they weren't always that colour.
You see, I've come from a long road of abuse and loneliness,
Fearful of love.
All I could see was a veil of darkness.
I saw no hope.
I only survived day to day
Oh, I admit that at times
I wasn't an angel.
But you know, one day I talked to God.
And today I am an angel,
Only my wing tips are the colour of faith, hope, peace and love.

On Thursday September 2, 1999 at 7:00 pm. Betty Nordin will celebrate the release of her very own book of poems entitled "Wing Tips". The book is being released at Grounds for Coffee and Antiques on 102 Avenue and 97 Street.

On Thursday, September 16, 1999, Linda Dumont will release her first book of poetry, "Shattered Rainbows", 7:00 pm as well at Grounds for Coffee.

Both books are published by The Songs of the Street Art Foundation.

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Fighting the Odds

NEW
FICTION
PART EIGHT

(In the last installment, Hope is still secretly thrilled by her brief meeting with the charming, blue-eyed man named Donald. Her co-worker Stephen teases her and says she's in love, and even her children notice the difference.)

by Allison Kydd

When two days had passed and no Donald appeared to rescue her from Claire and her other dragons, Hope told herself it was time to stop being so foolish and get on with her life. Even Stephen had been on her case about a sale she'd missed, and she didn't have to be told a busy store was no place to be slacking off.

After all, they were in the business of selling, as much and as fast as they could. In that way it was just like a department store. Other people, however, thought working in a bookstore was romantic. Just half an hour ago a woman had told her how lucky she was.

"Don't you just love it here?" the woman had gushed, showing far more teeth and gums than Hope wanted to see, "I'd give anything for your job. I'll bet when you're not busy, you just find yourself a corner and dip into the merchandise."

"Not when the boss's around," said Hope without thinking, then checked to see if she'd been overheard. "No time for that," she added, "and when I go home I'm much too tired. Reading's the last thing on my mind."

"No gold star for you," whispered Stephen as he came up beside her. "Are you asking for trouble or what?"

Hope made a face at him. She knew Stephen didn't like Claire anymore than she did, but he had the sense to keep it to himself.

When she'd started, just a year ago, she'd been gushy too, thought a bookstore was next door to being in heaven. But as usual nothing was perfect. Like Claire was much better at criticizing than giving credit. Hope wasn't as fast as some of the others and had never topped the sales list; still, she felt she deserved some appreciation.

She'd also thought people would be kinder about her break-up with her husband. Here she was, man-

aging it all, doing a better job of paying the bills than Kenny ever did, making sure her kids were decently fed and clothed, on time for school . . . most days. It would be so nice if someone seemed to notice. Instead, she was still being hassled about getting to work on time and being told her job was to "make that sale".

Her other problem was talking to the customers. Because she related to them in a friendly and personal manner, everyone got too friendly. Women with white hair rested on their walking sticks, called her "dearie" and wanted to tell their life stories. And men! Men were the worst. They acted as if she was flirting with them.

Hope also wanted a chance to do new things, such as displays. Claire had already criticized her one-of-a-kind-classics window. It wasn't interesting enough, she said, didn't make a strong impression and would have to come down Monday. That Hope had put a lot of time and care into that display didn't seem to matter.

Fortunately, Stephen was another story. He'd led more than one customer to Hope's window. He'd also told her he liked the way she'd arranged the books according to publication date.

Sometimes Hope wished she had somewhere else to go. The more she sensed Claire's disapproval, the less confident she became and the more mistakes she made. It was as if she was losing herself.

That was just what she was thinking when the man named Donald walked in the door. He looked right at her and headed her way, while immediately her face got hot and she could scarcely breathe.

"The lovely Hope," said Donald. "I was afraid it might be your day off."

"Saturday . . . Saturday's my day off . . ."

"So you get to sleep in on a Saturday then, you lucky girl?"

"Well not exactly. Not with the kids up so early."

"You have children?" Would he be less friendly now? she wondered.

"Yes, three. They're very good children."

"I'll wager they are, and pretty ones too. But you have other customers waiting . . ."

It was true. Several were lined up behind him.

She looked helplessly into his blue eyes. "I'll wait," he said, picking up a book from one of the displays nearby. She noticed it was the new Star Trek, wondered if he was a fan, decided she'd have to read one if he was.

It was ten minutes before Hope was finished with the rest of the line-up. When she looked around for him, Donald seemed to have left, which made her wish she'd ignored every one of Claire's precious paying customers.

"Dare I hope you're looking for me?" The quiet voice was right at her shoulder. Again she blushed.

"I have a confession to make," he said. "I didn't come back to buy a book. I came to ask you out for coffee."

"Why . . .?" Hope's voice came out in a whisper. He laughed.

"Well, I'd like to get to know you. You're not wearing a wedding ring, so I thought . . . If it's not all right, you can say so."

"When?"

"What about to-night?"

"I have to go home . . ."

"Or Saturday."

"Well . . ."

Hope knew he must think she was playing hard to get, but she really had no time of her own. And how could she let him know she wanted to see him without seeming too eager?

"I'm sorry," said Donald, "I'm being too forward. It's just that I didn't feel up to a tug-of-war with your boss for your attention."

Hope giggled at the thought of them fighting over her.

"I do have a coffee break," she said.

"Now we're getting somewhere," he said.

Half an hour later, he held the front door for her, reddening her cheeks again, and they walked out together. In his other hand, he held his purchases, three of her one-of-a-kind classics. To prove he wasn't just wasting her time, he said.

(to be continued)

STREET SEEN

by Cec Garfin

Ryan Wispiski



Ryan Wispiski a wood carver, received his first public exposure 2 years ago at "The Art From the Unknown" show. Now he can be found working on Whyte Avenue between 103 and 104th Street. Ryan is 26 years old and has lived in Edmonton his whole life. He gets ideas for carving from first hand life experiences, people encounters, travel, books and life changes. He is also getting into clay sculpting.

Ryan's first carving was of a face, done ten years ago. Four years ago he took a wood carving seminar course taught by a family friend named Lou. Ryan collects wood for carving in northern Alberta and BC. He works with cottonwood bark, uses caragena, bass wood and odd shaped pieces of drift wood. He also carves moose and deer antlers.

Ryan's father, his first mentor and first inspiration, is also a wood carver.

He has pieces of carving on display at Mazzuca II. Each carving is a personal experience to Ryan. He likes to get to know his customers.

People come to him and ask if he's making a decent living from the carvings. But money is not the real consideration. It's also the

challenge of creating a figure and the end results of the life through his work. It's about creating something out of a piece of wood or bone that he feels good about and that's appreciated by his customers and potential buyers. He meets people and is connected to people through this work.

"One question I am often asked is "are you making a living at this?" My answer is that it is not the living I make from my carving but the life I gain from it," says Ryan

"No I do not make a living at this. Though I do not care much for money, I realize that sadly we need it to survive in this world today. If at some point I was successful in supporting myself with my art I would be delighted. But if not I am still content, for it is the life that is important, the experience I get through developing a carving, all these things that led to each piece. These are treasures. And the people I get to meet and know. The way all this makes me feel inside, happy to know myself. When my day is done and I look back I can know myself truly wealthy, for I have the riches of friendship and experience, the riches of what wisdom and comfort this has all brought to me. For certain, carving has helped me to live." ♦

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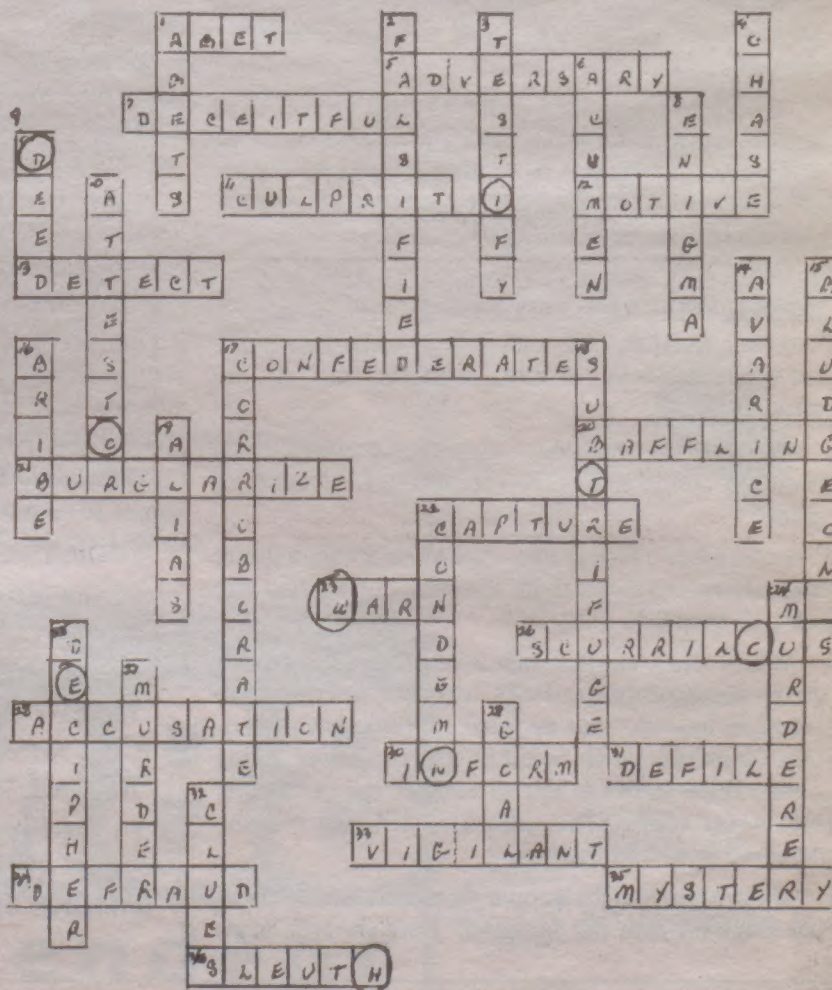
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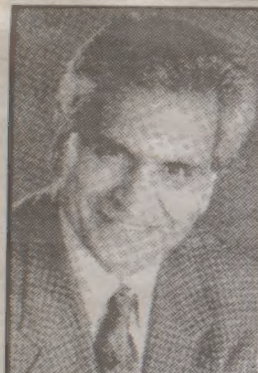
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IN EDMONTON

VENDOR Profile



Betty Nordin

John Zapantis

Betty Nordin is a rookie **Our Voice** vendor and a multi-talented individual.

She plays an integral role in the **Our Voice** community.

Betty started vending in July of 1999.

Her talent spreads over writing, poetry and visual arts.

Betty's poetry was recently published in the Songs of the Street poetry book Volume 3.

She also has a book of poetry published entitled "Wing Tips" that was released for publication on September 2, 1999. It currently retails for \$7.

"Vending helps me supplement my income as an artist," she says.

"I get a lot of enjoyment out of it. It helps me meet new people. It allows me to have more confidence in myself." ♦

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**Our
Voice**



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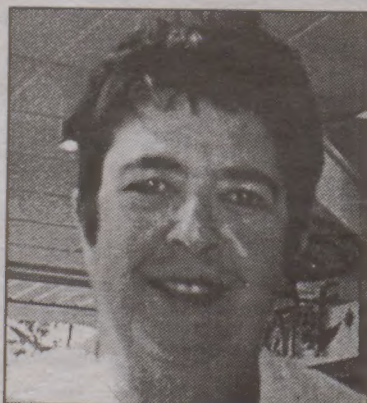
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OUR VOICE VENDOR'S CODE

- I will be sober at all times while working.
- I will be polite to all members of the public.
- I will vend only in areas that are authorised.

CITIZEN OF THE MONTH



June Kazeil

Cec Garlin

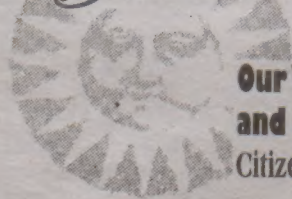
June has owned the Baskin Robbins on Whyte Avenue & 107 Street for the past 12 years.

She is a strong supporter of the Boyle Street Co-op and is presently raising \$2,700.00 to be directed to that agency. \$1.00 is coming from every waffle cone purchased during July and August 1999. The money raised will purchase an industrial sewing machine for the Arts and Crafts Studio. Other donations include ice cream for the children's Christmas Party and the dessert for the Macaroni & Cheese fund raiser, at Boyle Street Co-op.

Other gifts in kind have gone to the Win House and a Elementary School in the Whyte Ave area.

June says, if everyone would give a little bit or share more, it would make a big difference in the quality of the lives of all human beings.

Café Mosaics



**Our Voice Magazine
and Café Mosaics'**
Citizen of the Month

EVERY MONTH in **Our Voice**, we will be featuring someone who has gone the extra kilometre in their lives or in their careers to make a difference in the lives of those who are less fortunate.

The Citizen of the Month will receive a dinner for two courtesy of the Garneau Café Mosaics on Whyte Avenue.

Happy Page



Literacy Works International Literacy Day Celebration

Will include ceremony for 1999
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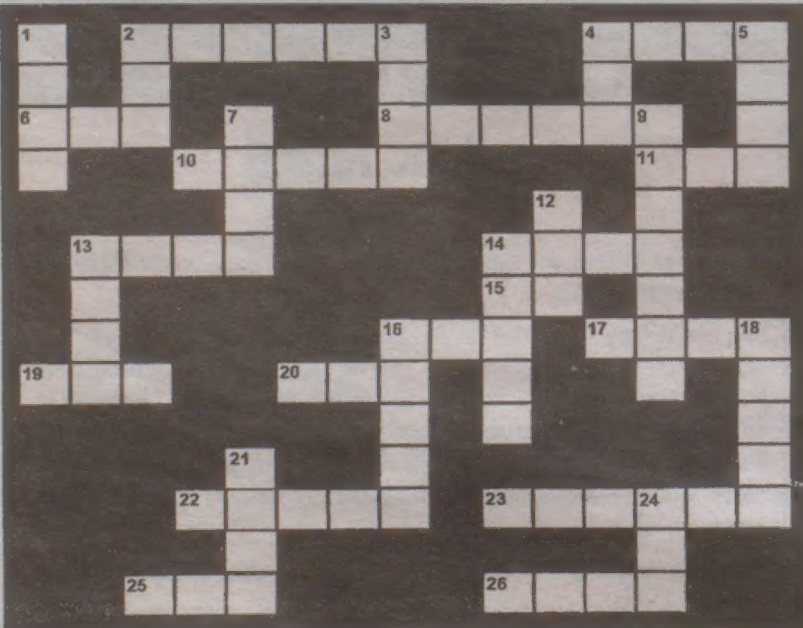
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Pete's Scrabble Crossword

ACROSS

- 2) Servile or small duty
- 4) The Babe
- 6) Fish eggs
- 8) Ball player's hand
- 10) Coloured shadings
- 11) Tear
- 13) Brylcreem units
- 14) Runt or urchin
- 15) ___ good as it gets
- 16) Small measles
- 17) Jail cubicle
- 19) Fast plane
- 20) Not him
- 22) Air ___
- 23) Slave or servant
- 25) Obese
- 26) Manure

DOWN

- 1) Emanating vibe
- 2) One of the Stooges
- 3) Carries something heavy
- 4) Bread or whiskey
- 5) Fibrous plant
- 7) What truckers call their trucks
- 9) Conscripted
- 12) Duran to Leonard -
"No ___! No ___!"
- 13) Springboard plunge
- 14) Shines to a gleam
- 16) Cherish
- 18) One dollar coin
- 21) I can't so I ___
- 24) Draft beer receptacle

Soupline Bob

